

## Commonwealth of Virginia Office of Governor Terry McAuliffe

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Office of the Governor

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## Governor and First Lady Dorothy McAuliffe Announce Plan to Construct Accessibility Ramp at Executive Mansion

~ Ramp will provide more dignified entrance for physically disabled ~

**RICHMOND** – Governor Terry McAuliffe and First Lady Dorothy McAuliffe announced today a project to enhance accessibility to the historic Executive Mansion by installing a ramp for guests with physical disabilities.

The Executive Mansion, designed by Alexander Parris and completed in 1813, is a National Historic Landmark and is recognized on the Virginia Landmarks Register and the National Register of Historic Places. It is the country's oldest purpose-built executive residence still in use today. While most visitors to the Mansion arrive by climbing steep steps up to the historic portico, visitors with physical disabilities are currently only able to access the main floor of the Mansion by using an elevator located on the side of the residence at basement level. The new ramp will connect to the existing breezeway, which leads to the southern entrance of the first floor of the Mansion. The first floor is the formal reception area used to welcome visitors and guests.

Speaking about today's announcement, **Governor McAuliffe said**, "Our family is honored to live in a home that holds such a prominent place in the history of Virginia and this nation, and we appreciate sharing this home with our visitors. While the Executive Mansion already meets federal accessibility guidelines, this enhancement will ensure that everyone who visits this historic home will receive a gracious and respectful welcome regardless of their physical limitations."

"The Governor and I are so grateful for the collaborative efforts of all who have come together to support this important initiative to ensure that the Executive Mansion is open and welcoming to all," **said First Lady Dorothy McAuliffe**. "We appreciate the guidance and support of those who have helped us balance the concerns of historical preservation and access for all our visitors."

"Great care will go into planning this addition to ensure that we respect and protect the historic integrity of the home while providing enhanced access for those with disabilities," **said Chris Beschler, Director of the Department of General Services**. "DGS will work closely with the preservation community to ensure that historic considerations are incorporated."

Secretary of Veterans and Defense Affairs John Harvey added, "Virginia has a long tradition of honoring its veterans, yet when they were invited to the Executive Mansion those who were disabled were forced to enter from another level. With this ramp, the Commonwealth is making it clear to those veterans and others with disabilities that they are welcome in the Governor's home."

Jim Rothrock, Commissioner of the Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services, stated that with this new ramp the "peoples' house" will be more accessible and welcoming to all Virginians, while continuing to honor the character of the historic building.

Construction of the ramp is expected to begin later this year after a contractor is selected and will be completed by early 2016. All work will be performed in accordance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties.

"Having seen the current method of entrance for guests with physical disabilities, I strongly concur with the Governor and First Lady's commitment to providing a more prominent and dignified entrance option," **said Julie Langan, Director of the Department of Historic Resources**. "It is the Department's opinion that the proposed ramp successfully balances the need to respect the architectural significance of this National Historic Landmark property with the First Family's desire to significantly improve access for those with physical disabilities."

Kathleen Kilpatrick, Executive Director of the Capitol Square Preservation Council, added: "The Mansion is one of Virginia's premier public resources and a point of pride for the Commonwealth and citizens as the nation's oldest purpose-built executive residence still in use today. The Council appreciates the careful consideration and due diligence that has gone and will continue to go into planning this new element, which we believe can be appropriately handled while enhancing the public experience of this important landmark."

Twenty-five years ago, through the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), our nation committed itself to eliminating discrimination against people with disabilities. The U.S. Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division is proud to play a critical role in enforcing the ADA, working towards a future in which all the doors are open to equality of opportunity, full participation, independent living, integration and economic self-sufficiency for persons with disabilities. Read more about the ADA here: http://www.ada.gov/index.html.

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